

on plumage characters exist (Williams 1996), but were designed for birds in western Europe. Geographical plumage variation can be greater than that between the sexes, invalidating its use for birds from the Indian subcontinent. The collection contained 44 birds sexed through internal examination, 10 males and 34 females, a skewed sex ratio which differs significantly from unity (Log-likelihood test: $G=13.83$, 1 df, $P<0.001$). This ratio, in favour of females, parallels the situation in Great Britain and is the result of different migration between the sexes from northern breeding areas. Whether the migrant long-eared owls wintering in the Punjab are from the Himalayan foothill population, long

distance migrants from north of the Himalayas, or a combination of both, is unknown.

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14. NEST USURPATION IN WOODPECKERS

Short (1979) has discussed in detail about the competition for nest cavities in woodpeckers which lose their nest cavities to secondary cavity nesters or even to woodpecker species larger than themselves. He also discusses the strategies adopted by them to avoid the loss of nest cavities.

During my study of woodpeckers at the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala, I came across an instance of nest usurpation. The loser was the Mahratta woodpecker (*Picoides mahrattensis*). the female bird was first noticed on 23 January 1992, excavating the trunk of a live *Eucalyptus* tree, 3.35 m from the ground. The trunk measured 22.9 cm in diameter at nest height. The male bird was also noticed

excavating the same site later the same morning. I had earlier seen this pair excavating, and later abandoning, two other holes on *Eucalyptus* trees. Excavation continued until the second week of February. In the last week of February, as there was no activity at the nest, I took a closer look and found a broken egg shell being removed by ants. Three days later, I saw lesser goldenbacked woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) flying from the nest tree. Over the next month, the goldenbacked woodpecker pair enlarged and excavated the nest cavity. The bird must have laid eggs, as I found the bird inside the cavity quite a few times, as I went past the tree. I was not able to follow the outcome as I had to follow up other nests.

It is possible that the Mahratta woodpecker lost its eggs due to the usurpation of its nest cavity by the pair of lesser goldenbacked woodpeckers. I had seen the latter species close to the nest even when the Mahratta woodpecker nest was active. The goldenbacked were tempted to usurp the nest because the nest site was on the trunk of a tree with adequate girth to meet their requirements. Smaller woodpeckers normally nest in smaller substrates (trunk/branch), thereby reducing the possibility of a take-over by their larger counterparts. The mean DNH (diameter

at nest height) size of the Mahratta woodpecker nests is 17.5 (\pm 3.91) cm while it is 28.3 (\pm 9.66) cm for the larger species (Santharam 1995). But in this case, as the nest was on a larger substrate, it was successfully taken over by the lesser golden-backed woodpeckers.

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15. SPECKLED PICULET *PICUMNUS INNOMINATUS* AND GOLDEN SPECTACLED FLYCATCHER-WARBLER *SEICERCUS BURKII* FROM MARGALLA HILLS, PAKISTAN

Between January and March 1995, we made a series of visits to the Margalla Hills on the outskirts of Islamabad, Pakistan. On the morning of 27th February two species noted by Roberts (1991, 1992) as being "extremely rare and local" in Pakistan were observed.

Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*

This species is found mainly in the foothills from Afghanistan, through India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and southwestern China (Roberts 1991). The species is extremely rare in the northwestern-most part of its range (Winkler *et al.* 1995). Roberts (1991) states that the species is very local in Pakistan, citing just a few records.

Roberts (1991) reports that despite intensive fieldwork in the Margalla Hills for the past 20 years the species has only been recorded twice, with records in July 1977 and April 1982. Since then, there has been one additional record of a single male on 11th May 1994 (Benstead *et*

al. in press).

We located a single female speckled piculet at c. 600 m on the edge of a clearing in deciduous secondary woodland. The bird, first located by its agitated chattering call, was observed for ten minutes at a range of 10-20 metres. The bird was watched foraging on slim branches and the trunks of saplings, allowing close approach. Although Roberts (1991) and Winkler *et al.* (1995) note that outside the breeding season speckled piculets often join mixed flocks, this bird was entirely alone.

This sighting, together with previously documented records, suggests that the Margalla Hills may support a small population of speckled piculets at low density. Winkler *et al.* (1995) suggest that the species is often overlooked due to its unobtrusive behaviour.

Golden Spectacled Flycatcher Warbler *Seicircus burkii*

This species occurs widely in south-